Viking Camps

Case Studies and Comparisons

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Chapter 15

Not a camp but a garrison: Martial life 'at home'

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15 Not a camp but a garrison

Martial life 'at home'

Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson

Introduction: a martial landscape with few identified sites

While knowledge is growing about Viking martial structures outside Scandinavia, such as ditches, camps, and enclosures, possible counterparts in the Scandinavian regions are generally less well known. In this chapter, it is suggested that the so-called garrison in the Viking Age town of Birka constitutes an interesting counterpart to the camps. The structural and material remains of the garrison are put into context and questions are raised concerning differences in opportunities and needs for a martial organisation operating at home compared to the challenges facing an army acting away from home.

Though the Viking Age generally is characterised as an era of conflicts and violence, the physical evidence of these conflicts is remarkably limited, even raising doubts about whether violence during this time has been overestimated (cf. Sigurðsson 2020). Apart from a few notable and well-known sites, like the Danish ringforts and the massive earthen rampart of Danevirke, archaeological remains of martial activities of any kind are surprisingly unusual. Even the skeletal material contains few individuals with apparent traces of lethal weapon injuries (Arcini 2018: 60–63). There are also no known mass graves of the type seen, for example, in Repton (Biddle & Kjølbye-Biddle 2001) or Ridgeway Hill (Loe et al. 2014). The question is whether the lack of both structures and skeletal material showing traces of violence linked to war and conflict relates to the fact that within the Viking homelands these acts of violence were less frequent, or that they took place in a different social context compared to that of the raids and campaigns abroad. However, although Viking Scandinavia in many ways constituted a social and cultural entity set apart from Continental Europe and the British Isles, it was in no way a homogeneous nor centrally governed political region. Rather, it was based on several power-political regions, chiefdoms, and kingdoms, where conflict and violence were endemic parts of society.

The geographical scope for this paper is set to the historical power-political region known as Svitiod, i.e. eastern middle Sweden, and in particular the town-like settlement of Birka and its surroundings. During the time period stretching from the Bronze Age to the sixth century, this region was

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particularly rich in ancient monuments known as 'hillforts' (Swe. *fornborgar*), while stone castles and fortified churches were erected from the twelfth century onwards. The Viking Age and latter part of the preceding Vendel Period (the Swedish term for the Merovingian period), on the other hand, seem to have been nearly 'fort-less' eras. The underlying causes for this apparent gap constituted the main question and driving force behind the research project 'Strongholds and Fortifications in Central Sweden AD 400–1100', conducted between the years 1998–2002 (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2013). Within the project, sites presenting possible martial constructions of various sorts were excavated, with the aim to either get a better chronology that would fill in the blanks, or identify possible causes for the general lack of martial structures. However, the results from the archaeological investigations did not provide clear answers, and the overall questions remain a matter for discussion. The most evident outcome of the 'Strongholds' project was that the fragmentary character of the archaeological source material requires a more holistic approach that focuses on the martial landscape rather than on individual sites (Olausson 2000: 126–128; 2009; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2013). In contrast to the scarcity and heterogeneity of the archaeologically identified structures, the toponymic sources provide a welcome contribution that is varied but also consistent with a notable presence of place names representing various military functions, like *-stäk* and *pål-*, referring to pile barricades in water, or *snäck*, indicating harbour sites (Westerdahl 1992: 10; Olausson 2009: 64; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2013: 291). Place names that include the common noun *rink* for 'warrior' are typical for eastern middle Sweden, complemented by karl ('free man'), *svein* ('young man' or 'young warrior'), *hersi* (leader, possibly connected to the organisation for maritime warfare), and other common nouns for what Stefan Brink in his toponymic studies characterises as military escorts (Brink 1999: 433; Vikstrand 2008; 2010). Together with place names signalling a king's manor or a chieftain's central farm, cult leaders, smiths, etc., the recurrent toponymic clusters reflect a hierarchical but also local social structure where warriors, retinues, and military organisation play a vital part (Brink 1999: 424–425, 433–436).

The garrison in Birka

However difficult and fragmentary the archaeological material from eastern middle Sweden might be, it does include a unique exception. The garrison of the Viking town Birka constitutes a site that with unexpected clarity and wealth of source material gives evidence of martial structures and organisation, as well as insights into the warriors' activities and everyday life. The site consists of several houses and other structures and is an archaeologically unique place without known contemporary parallels. The find material is extensive and derives from three main contexts: the construction phase with depositions and earthworks; the phase when the area was in use reflecting everyday life and activities; and a final phase including a battle and the final

destruction of the site. In the following discussion, the different features of the garrison will be presented, compared, and discussed in light of camp sites abroad.

Hjalmar Stolpe, the archaeologist so strongly associated with Birka, was the first to show interest in the area now known as the garrison. It was during his long-term excavations in the late nineteenth century that seven test pits were made on the site, most likely a part of Stolpe's ongoing mapping of the structures of the Viking town and its extensive cemeteries. Stolpe had noted a terrace-like construction in the slope, and focused most of his attention in this area. However, neither method nor documentation from these test pits maintain the same high standard known from Stolpe's other investigations, and contextual information is very scarce. The test pits exposed an extensive skeletal material without grave contexts and Stolpe named the area '*likbränningsplatsen*' (the cremation ground), implying that this was where bodies were cremated before burial.

Sixty years later, in 1934, Holger Arbman returned to the site and resumed excavations. This time, a long and narrow trench was laid out stretching from the Viking Age waterfront to the summit of the garrison slope. Two shorter, transverse trenches were taken up on the terrace that had caught Stolpe's interest. Arbman carefully documented his work by drawings in plan and section, collecting the finds in square metres. In his subsequent reports he describes the stratigraphy and the qualities of the different layers. Commenting on the finds, he finally concludes that, in contrast to the situation in the settlement, the cultural layers formed both on the terrace itself and below it on the slope towards the lake, contain almost exclusively objects belonging to a male population. 'It is tempting to regard these cultural layers as remnants of Birka's garrison' (Arbman 1935).

Apart from an insightful survey made by Gustaf Hallström in the 1920s (Hallström 1925), Arbman, with his excavation, was the first to properly acknowledge Birka's fortified structures. In addition to the garrison, the main elements of these structures are a semi-circular rampart enclosing the settlement, pile barricades limiting access to the harbour area, and a fort placed on bedrock on the highest point of the island. The fort, though following the building traditions of earlier periods, is unique in its dating to the Viking Age. Still highly visible from the water, it is the most striking remaining feature on Birka, where it towers over the fields where the settlement once was. From the fort, the view extends in all directions, overseeing the main water routes leading from the Baltic Sea further inland, into the core regions of Svitiod.

The features of the garrison

In the mid-1990s, it was again time to investigate the garrison area. Lena Holmquist initiated and led the archaeological excavations, which would come to last over ten years. Today, the area is almost completely surveyed, and the results of these excavations confirm Arbman's thoughtful suggestion

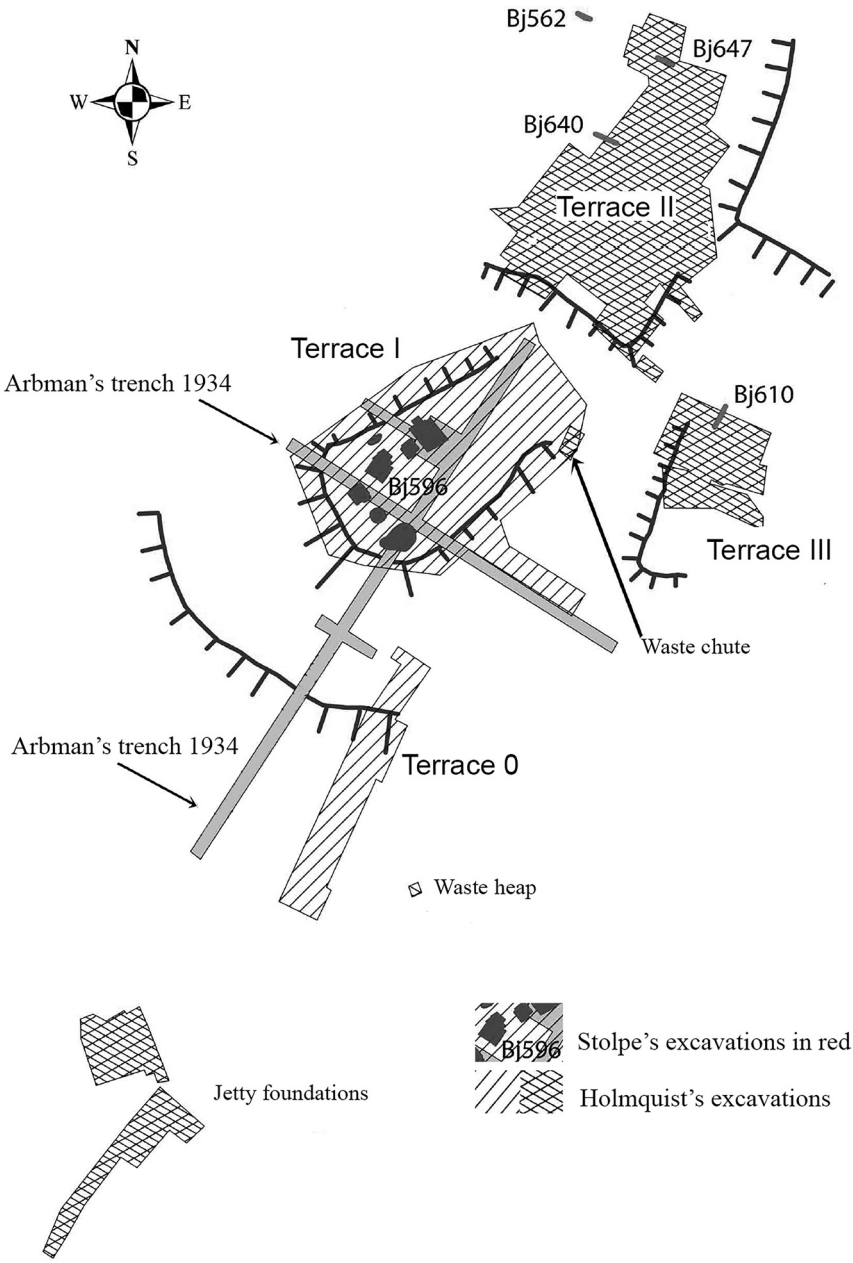

Figure 15.1 An overview of the garrison area with terraces and excavated areas marked out.
Source: Map based on Bergström 2013: Fig. 4, courtesy of the project Birkas befästningsverk, Archaeological Research Laboratory, Stockholm University.

that this indeed was the garrison. With Holmquist's excavations, a more complete picture has emerged, exhibiting the elaborate planning and structuring of the area together with the construction and contents of the different buildings, as well as providing an insight into the diversified activities that were taking place within the garrison (Holmquist Olausson 2002a; 2002b; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006; 2016, and references cited therein).

As noted, the garrison was placed in a slope connecting the fort with the waterfront. In order to use the rather steep space, major groundwork took place and four different terraces were constructed. Starting at the waterfront, the first terrace (T0) functioned as a base for a wooden palisade facing the water. Big post holes in a rectangular formation, and at some distance from each other, indicate a possible gate construction. A wooden path led up to the next terrace (TI), and further on to terraces II and III. Underneath the planks, a stone lined gutter provided drainage. A palisade on a low rampart fenced the area off to the sides, though it has not been possible to identify a similar construction at the upper end of the area, where the garrison merged with the entrance to the fort. Outside the lower palisade and possible gate, a stone foundation for a jetty implies that the garrison had a landing site, separated from the harbour of the town. At the other end of the area, a cistern for water ensured water supplies independent from that of the settlement area.

The three upper terraces (TI, TII, and TIII) all contained buildings, but of different size and character. The purpose of and activities in the building on terrace III is most elusive. Despite providing a number of loom weights, fragments of a shield boss, and a bronze weight, the extent of the find material is limited in comparison to the other buildings and it has proven difficult to determine what the building was used for. In contrast, terrace II appears to have held a succession of buildings, with activities dominated by crafts of various sorts. The most striking feature is a smithy, with a short but intense period of use. There is also evidence of textile production through loom weights and spindle whorls, and wood working with tools such as chisels, an auger, and axes. Although much of the craftwork probably consisted of maintenance, the garrison's smithy has also produced objects that in an interesting way reflect the particular character of the site: padlocks, knives, and Thor's hammers (Ahlin Sundman 2002: 22; Gustafsson 2005; Hackelberg 2007; Hedenstierna-Jonson in print [2023]).

The most impressive building by far was nevertheless the so-called 'Warriors' house', situated on terrace I. Measuring almost 200 square metres, the building was constructed in the traditional longhouse fashion, with slightly curved walls and a high-rising roof supported by pairs of posts creating a wide internal space. The long side facing the fort and connecting to the wooden path up the slope had two separate entrances, while there is no clear evidence of an inner room division. However, the spacious interior, with considerable ceiling height, seems to have been divided into two areas, possibly separated by some kind of inner construction. The space of the house

closest to the waterfront, with its concentration of high-status finds by a hearth—e.g. sherds of glass beakers, gilt bronze mounts, and a dragon-head made of bronze—has been interpreted as the place of the high seat. The walls were lined with spears and shields, as well as locked cases, indicated by padlocks, keys, and chest fittings. The space at the other end of the building contained a rectangular second hearth, surrounded by objects suggesting this was more of a workspace (Holmquist Olausson & Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002; Holmquist Olausson 2002b: 162–163).

In studies carried out by Frands Herschend (1993; 1997) and Lydia Carstens (2014: 15), a series of criteria are presented for what distinguishes a hall building, including construction, location, the layout of the interior, and activities connected to the building. The 'Warriors' house' conforms in all essentials to these criteria. Structurally, the building was of unusual height, with double entrances and a wide interior space with two large fireplaces. Compared to other known hall buildings, it was rather small in size, but the compact proportions were most likely due to the adaptation to the terrain conditions. In accordance with the criteria, the building was located next to the settlement, but in an elevated position in the terrain and overlooking the sea routes. Also, the activities carried out within, and adjacent to the building comply with the set criteria. While the surrounding terraces, as noted, show evidence of workshops and crafts, the 'Warriors' house' was a building for assemblies and festivities, rather than everyday life.

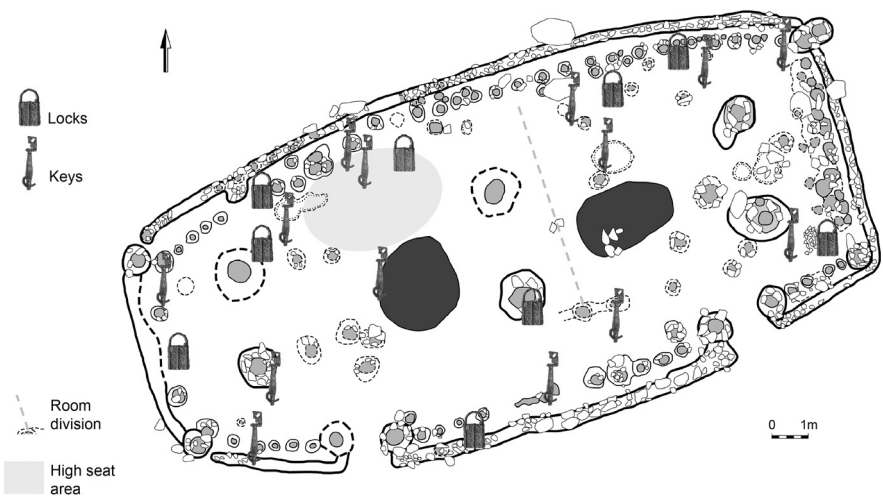

Figure 15.2 The distribution of keys and padlocks in the 'Warriors' house'. Room division and high seat area are marked out.
Source: Drawing based on Holmquist Olausson and Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002, courtesy of the project Birkas befästningsverk, Archaeological Research Laboratory, Stockholm University.

A timeline of events

Since the garrison area is almost completely investigated, and the finds are extensive and their position well documented, it has been possible to assemble a more detailed picture of what happened at the site and create a timeline of events. The material culture, as well as the constructions, can be generally divided into four different phases: (1) before the garrison was in place, (2) the construction phase, (3) time of usage, and (4) the destruction and abandonment of the area.

According to Arbman's report, the area originally sloped steadily down towards the water, but had been somewhat levelled before the garrison was established. There is evidence of a succession of fires lit on the site. These fires were not, as Stolpe initially suggested, for human cremations, and the ash layers contained, with the exception of a few iron nails, only burnt animal bones (Arbman 1935: 13). The phase preceding the garrison was also identified in later excavations, through cultural layers underneath the terrace structures, and a building, underlying the earth works of TI (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1998; Bergström 2013: 17–18).

Terraces II and III contain remains of several partly overlapping buildings. The earliest of these may possibly date to the second half of the ninth century. Crafts seem to have been the dominating activities during this time period. Due to the unusual amount of weaponry found also in these early contexts, it is likely that the site had a martial function, or served as a garrison at this stage. During Stolpe's excavations a handful of supposed burials were examined and given numbers in accordance with Stolpe's grave list. They have since been dismissed, and more likely represent features connected to the various buildings. However, two graves were discovered in connection with Holmquist's excavations of TII, both dated to the early-ninth century. They are interpreted as not being directly related to the activities of the garrison, but rather seen as an indication that there is no clear demarcation between the garrison and the adjacent cemetery (Bergström 2013: 7, 45–49, 148–150).

The garrison's construction phase involved transporting extensive masses of stone, soil, and clay to the site, to be used to level the ground and build foundations for overlying structures, such as wooden palisades and buildings. Although these constructions must have been initiated when the buildings on TII and TIII were erected, it appears the whole area received a more comprehensive planning and structuring when TI was made and the 'Warriors' house' erected on top of it. After construction, the garrison was inhabited and used for little over a century, albeit the great house was a late addition to the site. The main period of activities, including various crafts, maintenance of weaponry and gear, as well as recurring gatherings and feasting, can be dated to the tenth century. Time of usage reflects the everyday life of the warriors and conveys activities linked to martial life, apart from actual warfare.

Life in the garrison comes to an abrupt stop as the last phase comprises the remains of a battle and the final destruction of the site. It is unusual to be able to

follow an individual event through the archaeological material as clearly as one can do in the garrison. This is perhaps most evident in the final phase on the site, as the distribution of finds shows that the garrison was exposed to an attack from the water. The palisade works on the lower terrace were hit by repeated rounds of arrows before the attackers could enter the area and attack the hall building itself. Concentrations of complete and broken weapons, especially around one of the entrances and the area around the high seat, show where the battle was fiercest. The material even contains an arrowhead with space for a burning cloth, meant to set the buildings on fire. The garrison also burned down during this final battle, and the site was abandoned. It has proven difficult to exactly date this final event, but it took place during the second half of the tenth century (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006; Bergström 2013: 148).

Archaeological evidence of a martial lifestyle

Viking Age warriors as a group rarely appear visibly in archaeological contexts and, as individuals in graves, warriors are usually debated and associated with a number of caveats. The evidence that emerged during the

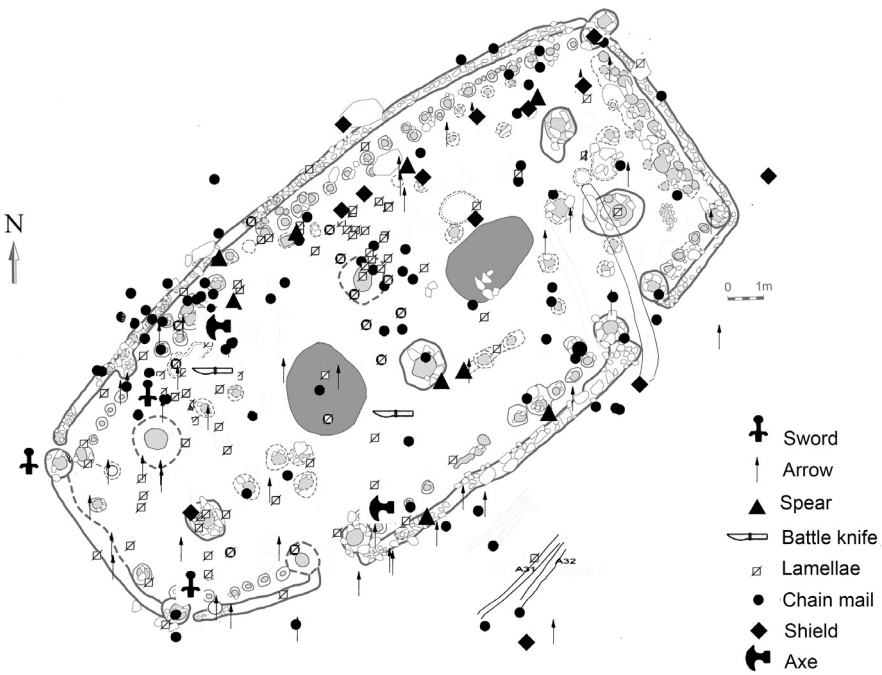

Figure 15.3 The distribution of weaponry in the 'Warriors' house'.
Source: Drawing based on Holmquist Olausson and Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002, courtesy of the project Birkas befästningsverk, Archaeological Research Laboratory, Stockholm University.

excavations in the garrison, however, provide a welcome insight into various aspects of martial life, paralleled by what is conveyed by the material from camp sites linked to Viking campaigns. The finds are extensive in number, but relatively limited in type and category. While particular groups of artefacts have been retrieved in abundance, e.g. knives of various size and model, other groups of artefacts, otherwise common in settlement contexts, are rare or completely lacking. As an example of the latter, pottery and vessels for cooking and storing of food are scarce. However, the evidence of food consumption is extensive, suggesting that the warriors were provided with food from elsewhere (Frostne 2002; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006: 62). According to the food remains, diet among the warriors included a greater quantity of cattle and lesser amount of pig compared to the material from the settlement area (Wigh 2001, Fig. 64). In addition to the more common porridge, there are also remains of bread, which together with the meat indicate a high-status environment (Isaksson 2000; Bergström 2008). The introduction of bread into Scandinavian society is considered a 'soldier import' that came as a result of Scandinavian warriors participating in the auxiliaries along the Limes during the Roman Iron Age (Zachrisson 2021: 220–221). The earliest bread find in present-day Sweden has been dated to the third century, but the introduction of bread into food culture was a slow process and during the Viking Age it was still something that was reserved for the social elite (Bergström 2008: 183–184).

Weapons of war and deposits

In the garrison, the category of finds that stands out and possibly deviates most clearly from settlement material in general is weapons. As noted above, all parts and phases of the site have been shown to contain weapons and the material comprises examples of most of the Viking Age weapon types: swords, axes, spears, javelins, arrows, and fighting knives, as well as shields and chain mail. As a complement to the more typical chain mail, there is also a selection of splint or lamellar armour that is unique for its time in a Scandinavian context (Stjerna 2004). The most striking context in which weapons have been found is the previously mentioned battle that took place on the site and which subsequently led to the garrison being destroyed and abandoned. But there are also weapons in the contexts connected to everyday life. When the garrison was at its height, shields were placed on or along the walls and weapons such as spear heads and arrows were kept in locked wooden cases along the walls of the 'Warriors' house'. The wood is not preserved, but the cases are suggested through distribution of fittings and locks, and the placement of weaponry bundled together and with cloth-marks imprinted in the corrosion layers. Over 40 padlocks have been found in the garrison. In addition to these, there are traces of the manufacture of padlocks in the smithy. Clearly, the warrior group felt the need to lock away their weapons. The weapon sets in the garrison are generally more standardised than those in the

graves. This has been seen as an indication that these warriors were provided with most of their equipment and that their weapons were communal rather than personal. A circumstance that may have influenced perceptions of ownership, which in turn affected how they were handled and stored (Gustafsson 2005; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015: 78–81).

Weapons were present also in the early stages of the garrison. During the establishment of the garrison area, spear heads were deposited into the different structures and have been interpreted as having a symbolism referring to Odin in his capacity as the god of war and warriors (Kitzler 2000). By placing the spear heads into the very structures of the house, rampart, and other features, a kind of conceptual enclosure was created, possibly seen as protected by Odin. There is a marked ritual and religious expression in the garrison as a whole. In addition to the spear heads, other types of depositions have been found. In connection with the construction of the hall building, carefully selected combinations of objects were deposited in the post holes of the two centrally placed roof-bearing posts, which also seem to have marked the spatial location of the entrance to the high seat area. One of these depositions was excavated both by Stolpe and Arbman, and only identified as a deposition later on. The contents are therefore somewhat unclear, but the 'great pit', as Arbman called it, still contained pieces of chain mail, lamellar armour, and coins when it was re-examined during Holmquist's excavations (Arbman 1935; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1998: 31–32). The deposit at the other post, on the other hand, was undisturbed by previous investigations and contained an interesting mix of objects that include spear heads, a Thor's hammer, and a sword chape with the depiction of the crucified Christ, as well as numerous pieces of antler comb-cases interpreted as representing the individual warriors based in the garrison at the time. Two Islamic dirhams, the latest of which was struck in 922/923, provide a TPQ for the establishment of the 'Warriors' house' (Holmquist Olausson & Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002: 16; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002; 2006: 64–66; 2015: 75–77). Other amulets from the garrison include an amulet ring with miniature carvings, interpreted as a symbol of Frey, which means that three of the most central gods in the Old Norse religion were represented on the site. It is apparent that ritual and religious expressions of various kinds formed an intrinsic part of life in the garrison, something that is further emphasised by the production of Thor's hammers in the smithy (Ahlin Sundman 2002; Bergström 2013: 140).

Literacy, gambling, and trade

A cautious insight into the more intellectual aspects of garrison life is given through objects that suggest a certain level of literacy among the warriors. There are examples of both styli and wax tablets, as well as runic inscriptions on bone and metal amulets (Gustavson 2001; 2009; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2010). The archaeological source material indicates that Birka in general, and

the warriors in particular, were to some extent literate during this time. It is something that stands out in comparison with the surrounding society that continued to be dominated by oral traditions (Zacharopoulos 2021). Another aspect of intellectual activity is that of board games. Though often perceived as spare time leisure, games nonetheless required a certain level of abstract thinking, and could be seen as an expression of strategical and tactical training (cf. Whittaker 2006; Kimball 2013; Hadley & Richards 2021: 107). Gaming pieces made from lead have become one of the signature artefacts in the discussion of Viking camp sites (Jarman 2018; Hadley & Richards 2018; 2021: 123–126). Gaming pieces also form part of the material culture in the garrison, though in these cases they are made from bone and glass (Bergström 2013: 119–120). Worth special mention are the examples of medical tools identified in the material. They consist of scalpels, tweezers, specific needles (e.g. so-called Seton needles), and bloodletting-irons (Frölich 2011: 323, Fig. 4). Although these tools have a marked practical side, the ability to use them properly required considerable knowledge if the result was to be successful. According to Annette Frölich, who identified and analysed the material, the presence of these instruments indicates that there was medical knowledge at the site that also followed 'contemporary "up to date" international medical theories' (Frölich 2011: 324).

Unmistakably, crafts were at the heart of activities in the garrison, with evidence of metal working, textile production, and wood working. As noted, many of the craft activities may have related to maintenance of weapons, equipment, and other items like clothing. But there was a certain level of production as well, not least in the smithy, but also regarding textiles. Textiles and textile production are generally regarded as something outside of the martial sphere of society. There is a general reluctance to link both textiles and textile production to society's martial aspects, warriors, and warfare in general. This approach probably reflects a recurring view of textiles as something that belongs to the household domain and to preconceived notions of gender roles linked to both household and military activities. In fact, the occurrence of textile tools is often interpreted as an indication of a female presence (cf. Bergström 2013: 109, 150; Hadley & Richards 2021: 108). The assumption is based primarily on how textile tools appear in the grave material. It is highly likely that textile production in society in general was linked to the female sphere. At the same time, there is nothing to exclude the possibility that textile handling and production in specific environments was performed by men. A military following or an army may well constitute such specific environments, where there was also a constant need for repairs and maintenance of clothing and textile equipment. Martial activities such as raiding and campaigning were also highly mobile and required, for example, sacking for stowage and transport, tents, and sails (Hedenstierna-Jonson in print [2023]). In the garrison, there is very little or no evidence of other objects commonly considered to be linked to women. In general, most of the objects represent a martial material culture, which predominantly, though not

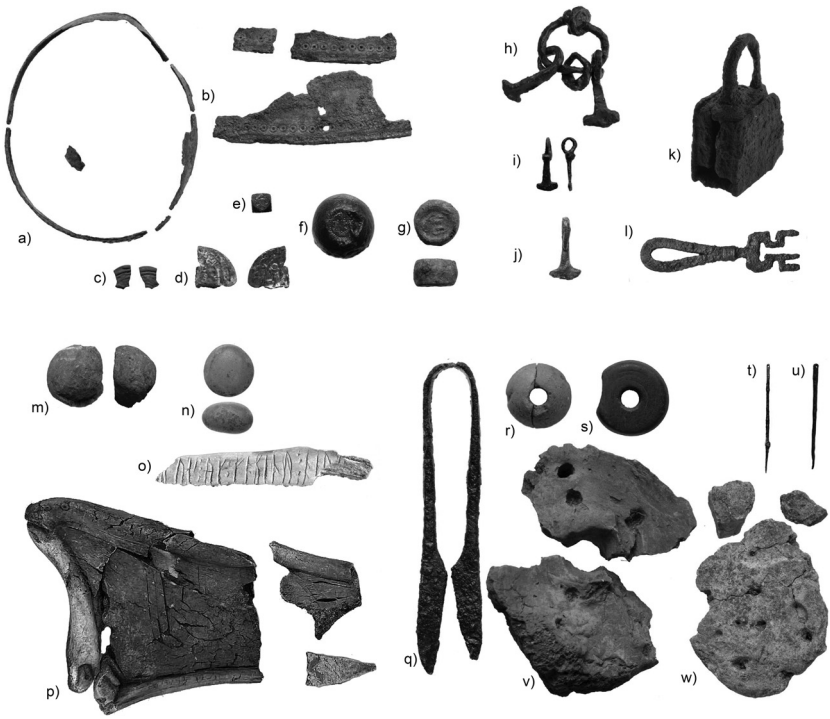

Figure 15.4 An artefact signature of the garrison including: (a–b) scales, (c–d) coins, (e–g) weights, (h–j) Thor's hammer amulets, (k) padlock, (l) key, (m–n) gaming pieces, (o) rune bone, (p) wax tablet, (q) scissors, (r–s) spindle whorls, (t–u) sewing needles, (v–w) loom weights.
Source: Photographs courtesy of the project Birkas befästningsverk, Archaeological Research Laboratory, Stockholm University and photograph (p) by kind permission from Themistoklis Zacharopolous.

necessarily exclusively, belonged to a male population (cf. Arbman 1935). It is therefore likely that the textile handling and production in this particular case was also carried out by those who were part of the warrior group.

The last category of objects to be presented here are those connected to trade: coins, weights, and scales. Given its limited area, the garrison has been found to contain a surprisingly large number of coins, 88 pieces. Most are Islamic dirhams, but Western European silver coins and Byzantine copper coins are also represented in the material. The dates of the coins correspond well to the different phases of the garrison, with an accumulation during the ninth century, but also with some of Birka's latest coins from the latter part of the ninth century (Jonsson 2001; Rispling 2013: 243; Bergström 2013: 113–115). Next to the coins are a series of weights and parts of a balance scale. Like the coins, the number of weights is also relatively extensive (22 pieces) given the limited space. The weights deriving from the garrison testify

primarily to trade with eastern areas, where the weight system was based on the Arabic weight unit mithqal (Schultzén 2009).

To sum up, if treated as a wide-ranging assemblage, the archaeological material from the garrison provides us with a unique insight into a martial lifestyle that affected everything from warfare and world view to everyday life and food culture. It shows the diversity of activities connected to a warrior's life, but also offers an insight into their mental and intellectual world with conceptions of ownership and possession, literacy and religion. The material reflects different stages in the use and development of the garrison area, with the final stage including the erection of the so-called 'Warriors' house' and the final battle.

Not a camp but a garrison – comparisons and discussion

So far, the garrison has been presented from a structural and contextual point of view. As there are currently no other known similar sites, a number of questions are raised concerning how it relates to other martial aspects of Viking society. What function did it have and in what way was it related to the town of Birka as well as to local and regional authorities?

Birka was established in the middle of the eighth century, probably on royal initiative, in response to the need to collect and control trade and production. As part of a structure where power was divided between the king and regional chieftains, the new town quickly developed into a major centre for crafts and trade (cf. Ambrosiani 2002: 340ff). During the following century (750–860), Birka was part of a trade network centred around the Baltic coastline and the North Sea, with links to the Carolingian Frankish Empire and Anglo-Saxon England. In the latter part of the ninth century, the significance of these connections declined as Birka became an important node in the eastern trade network, sharing close contacts with similar sites along the rivers of present-day Russia and Ukraine. The Baltic Sea area developed into a transit zone for travel further east, towards Volga-Bulgarian areas on the Ural Mountains and towards Kyiv and Constantinople. The changes in trade interests and network contacts affected the town's structure but also changed the conditions for who had the actual power and could control trade. Birka's warriors were intimately associated with the town's activities and the garrison's functions during its various phases most likely reflect the shifts in power that the changed trade relations brought with them. Actual power was increasingly transferred from the king and the regional chieftains to an emerging economic elite who travelled along the trade routes and therefore had tangible power over goods and transactions. This transfer in power became explicit with the construction of the 'Warriors' house' in the first half of the tenth century. It must have been perceived as a challenge of royal power, which was demonstrated through the king's manor on the adjacent island of Adelsö. As noted, the house in the garrison was not only a grand building, but a hall according to set criteria, with the political connotations

that this entails (Carstens 2014: 14). Characterised as a space for assemblies and feasting, it was a manifestation of power, fitting for a chieftain or king, and placed within sight from the manor on Adelsö.

But it was not only the garrison that was an exceptional feature. The tangible structures of demarcation and fortification that enclosed the settlement set Birka apart from many of the contemporary Viking towns. Lena Holmquist has through her archaeological investigations shown that, beginning in the mid-eighth century, the settlement was surrounded by an earthen rampart with a wooden palisade. Elevated over the enclosed town area was a fort, constructed in a similar fashion as the town rampart, but of greater dimensions. The garrison was situated outside one of the gates of the fort, but with the same elevated position. From the fort and the garrison there is a view of both the town area and the waterways that lead into the town harbour. Remains in the waters outside imply possible pile barricades or other structures that limit and control access to the town (Holmquist Olausson 2002a; 2002b; Lindström et al. 2012: 31). Around 900, the different structures of demarcation and fortification were reinforced and a few decades later the 'Warriors' house' was constructed, marking the final and most manifest phase of the garrison. The reasons behind this development are both complex and debated, but the expansion of the structures most likely answers to a perceived threat as well as an increased need for control, and should be seen in the context of the power-political situation in Svitiod at the time (cf. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2016).

Birka with its garrison provides a useful case study but is at the same time contradictory in a time when martial structures on a general level are lacking. When exploring potential sites for fortifications and other possible martial structures within the scope of the research project 'Strongholds and Fortifications' (mentioned before), it became evident that more than anything else, it was the landscape in itself that provided information. Where the fort had been the dominating martial feature of previous periods, archaeological remains from the Viking Age appear different. Together with place names, features like ramparts and pile barricades indicate fortification systems by which territories could be controlled. Moving away from specific sites where power could be exercised at a limited local level, a landscape of defence and control was constructed, regulating movement and transport of goods. The structure of society changed, which led to other forms of war and conflict and consequently the organisation and expression of warfare itself (Olausson 2000: 128). In a martial structure where the landscape was fundamental, thus implying a high level of mobility among warriors, camps should be a natural part. Despite this, archaeological remains in Scandinavian contexts are lacking, begging the question: why?

The garrison in relation to the camps

The question is why it has not yet been possible to identify camp sites in Scandinavian contexts. Unlike the situation in, for example, Anglo-Saxon

England, there are no written sources that provide a reference to the possible location of such sites. Instead, and although it cannot be seen as representative, the garrison at Birka offers a starting point for further exploring the possibility of identifying places that may have fulfilled similar functions to the camps. The methodological approaches differ somewhat as the camps initially have been pinpointed based on textual sources and the sites extensively investigated through metal detection and field walking, but with limited archaeological excavations. The garrison, not mentioned in any textual sources, is on the other hand almost completely excavated, which gives a different and complementary picture as most types of material, including organic remains, are represented. At the same time, the garrison is much more limited in its geographical distribution, and several of the functions identified in the camps are not present but instead represented in the connecting town. Despite the differences, there are several similarities between camps and the garrison, not least when it comes to the rather specific material culture. Dawn Hadley has defined an artefact signature of the Viking camps, based on the work she has done with Julian Richards and others at the Torksey camp site together with evidence compiled in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (Hadley & Richards 2021: 118, 123–126; see also 2016; 2018 and the present volume; cf. Williams 2020). The signature comprises six main elements: hack metal, lead and copper-alloy weights, stycas, Anglo-Saxon silver pennies, Anglo-Saxon and Irish dress accessories and mounts, and finally, lead gaming pieces. The categories are, naturally, geographically situated, and therefore not of equal relevance when compared to the garrison. Despite the differences though, interesting similarities can be seen, exemplified by the weights, coins, and gaming pieces. As noted, in both Torksey and the Birka garrison, the artefacts are not typical settlement assemblages, but reflect the activities carried out at these specific sites, such as metalworking, textile handling and production, trading, and gambling (cf. Hadley & Richards 2016; 2021: 123; Hedenstierna-Jonson in print [2022]). It can be assumed that both the camps and the garrison are manifestations of a common lifestyle and variances in location, size, mobility, and surrounding infrastructure were some of the major differences. Where the camps functioned as a kind of refuge in an otherwise hostile environment, the garrison was part of a larger structure that provided much of the infrastructure whilst the garrison's warriors were involved in maintaining and securing it.

Martial life at home – thoughts and conclusions

Although Birka's garrison so far is the only one of its kind, it is reasonable to assume that there were similar sites that hopefully will be identified and investigated in the future. In the Swedish context the possible locations of garrisons have been discussed in connection to specific place names, but so far without archaeological confirmation (cf. Olausson 2000). During the Viking Age, there was a gradual transfer in power structure, from locally exercised

power over people, to more centrally administered control over territories. The martial structures naturally reflected the changes in social order and individual structures, like the forts from previous times, were replaced by a variety of structures and functions complementing each other and creating a martial landscape with the ability to control land, territory, and the movement through it. To identify garrisons and similar places in such a complex and widespread environment, it is therefore more fruitful to combine place names with the specific characteristics that have emerged in the comparison of camps and garrison, including location in the landscape and material culture that reflects activities and lifestyle.

But the question remains whether or not proper camp sites will be identified in the Scandinavian region. Should we expect to find them within the core areas of Viking society? Within Scandinavia, warriors would in a sense be 'at home', surrounded by a familiar social structure with family ties, loyalties, and alliances providing security and support. Some scholars even claim that the Viking Age social structure, through its intricate web of friendships and kinships, 'played a crucial role in the power game, and the overlap of these ties was one important reason for the peace in the Viking Age' (Sigurðsson 2020: 22). Groups of warriors were based at home, or within the extended household of their military leader. But given that Viking Scandinavia was based on several power-political regions, chiefdoms, and kingdoms where conflict and violence were endemic parts of society, Viking Age peace should most likely not be exaggerated. Alliances and agreements would at times be negotiated by force rather than politics, conflicts between competing rulers were frequent, and warriors would have needed to be mobilised and relocated. This is where the need for camps or something similar might have come in. It is possible that the social structures based on family and friendship ties allowed warriors to be housed in households of allies. Within Scandinavia warriors would thus have been lodged rather than encamped (cf. Sigurðsson 2020). The warriors connected to the town of Birka were different. The ties between them and the chieftain or king were conceivably more distant and over time replaced by ties to the special activities and people of the town. In a way, the garrison warriors were no longer part of anyone's household, but part of the urban structure which also formed the basis of their power and economic status. In this sense, the garrison has more in common with the campsites in hostile regions abroad, and a comparison between them is relevant. Yet, the garrison was not a camp site and at first glance a large number of differences between them may well be expected, not least in terms of temporality and relationship to the surrounding area. But an in-depth comparison of the archaeological source material highlights important similarities, reflecting a common lifestyle, comparable military organisation, and shared needs for production, maintenance, transport, and trade, as well as an element of practical and intellectual preparation.

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